

2nd SUNDAY OF EASTER
April 8, 2018

Text: 1 John 1:1-2:2

Theme: See, Hear, Touch

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Amen! Alleluia!

Our voices are a little more subdued than they were last week but do not let that dampen our enthusiasm this morning. Easter is here for 50 whole days so please do not think (for one moment) that we are back to business as usual. Last Sunday we experienced the glory of the resurrection and today the real work begins. Today we start to define what it means to live into the reality of Easter. Unlike the disciples we do not need to huddle behind closed doors. It is time for us to step out and to step up as a faith community to determine how best to send this incredible message out into the world.

Where should we start? I was so excited when I read the lesson from 1 John because it seems to me that God is handing us the answer to that simple question in a very neat and concise way. Within it we learn that our first assignment is to experience the world as if we were the eyes and ears of Christ.

What have we heard?

And what have we seen?

For those of you who have been out in the mission field with me you know these have become my standard questions to ask at the end of the day or at the end of an experience. And the last time I asked these questions was just last week when twelve of us took a walk through the downtown section of McLean. It was Holy Saturday and we gathered ourselves at 9 am around the large cross in our Crossroads. Using a more contemporary version of the *Stations of the Cross* we completed the first set of prayers and then ventured out into the crisp, sunny morning air to carry this smaller (but still heavy) cross through our memorial garden and over to the medical building, down behind the wine store and up through the fire station and then back again to the church passing by the hardware store, restaurants, and banks.

What did we see? We saw lots of people staring at us as we stopped and prayed at different places along the way. Most of them had to stop at a red traffic light and they kept their eyes on us until the light turned green. Some were entering the different stores in McLean and they simply nodded to us or wished us a good morning or just gave us curious looks. At an early stop we gathered ourselves in a parking lot but I did not realize that we were right next to a parked car with a woman sitting in the driver's seat. Once she saw that we would be right next to her she left as quickly as possible from the scene. We were each left to surmise her thoughts. Clearly we knew that if we were not carrying such a visible cross then she and everyone else would not have noticed us at all. We would simply have been a small group of people taking a walk.

What did we hear? We heard the noise of traffic and trucks and buses as we tried to listen to the reflections and prayers we carried with us. The words we used for the *Stations of the Cross* grew heavier upon our hearts as we moved from one place to another. As Jesus was condemned to death we read about people who are condemned today for the color of their skin, their gender, and/or their beliefs. As Jesus was feeling the weight of his cross, we read about the different burdens that others carry (those that are obvious and those that we hide). As Jesus stumbled and fell, we heard the loud cries of human suffering. As we stood with Mary, the mother of our Lord, we shed our own tears as we remembered the loss of loved ones.

In the span of one hour we saw and heard and experienced something very moving. But 1 John offers us a third question to contemplate in this our first assignment of how to step out and how to step up as a faith community. And that third question is this:

What have we touched?

This third question clearly takes us to the next level of our assignment because we can enter the world anytime we want and observe what is going on and listen to what is being said and contemplate its meaning. It sounds easy enough (but it does take some practice to learn how to quiet ourselves long enough to see and to listen and then to allow time to reflect). But now we are being asked to take what we have seen and heard and then go and touch the lives of others.

This third question helps us reframe the exchange between Thomas and the disciples as they sat behind those closed doors. The disciples tell Thomas that they saw the Lord with their very own eyes. But Thomas said to them:

Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.

And then lo and behold, Jesus comes and stands among them. Once Thomas heard his voice and once he saw the marks on his hands and once he touched the scars on both his hands and in his side, then he cried out – *My Lord and my God.*

The miracle we see and hear today is that the risen Christ appears to his scared and confused and frightened disciples. He lets them see him once more and he lets them hear his words once more so that they will gain the confidence they need to leave that room and touch the lives of others in the name of Jesus Christ. They do not warrant a second visit by Christ but they get one. Christ does not have to repeat his words of peace but he does so anyway. Thomas receives what he requested – a chance to see and touch Jesus for himself.

Sometimes it is not enough to see and/or to hear.
Sometimes we need the touch.

As we stood around the large cross in the Crossroads at the end of the *Stations of the Cross*, we processed our thoughts and prayed. Then we each left to do whatever we needed to do. I left to visit Heather and her mom who had just been placed in hospice care. We held her hand and prayed that God would gently take her home.

Since Tuesday I have been making home visits to those who cannot come to church. One woman is weak from pneumonia and when I reached out my hand to pray with her she said unsteadily – *Are you sure you want to touch me?* I assured her that I did.

On this Sunday we are baptizing four children, Brayden and Tessa, Benjamin and Tyler. When they come forward to the baptismal font we will hear the words of God and then I will touch them with the water that has been blessed and I will touch them again and make the sign of the cross on their foreheads to signify that they have been sealed by the cross of Christ forever.

It is the touch that helps us have a real encounter with Christ. It is the touch that completes our first assignment towards stepping out and stepping up as a faith community.

See what is in front of you. Listen to what you hear. Then touch the lives of others as we have been touched by the crucified and risen Lord.

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Amen! Alleluia!